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ABSTRACT

Because the year-round school, if adopted, produces change in the way of the lives of students, their parents, school staff, and possibly much of the community, an information dissemination program about the year-round school must be broader, more inclusive, and better planned and executed than any other innovative program in a school district. Guidelines for developing an effective dissemination program include the selection of personnel, the kind of information to present, the people to contact, staff organization, and strategies. Three dissemination phases -- lead up, implementation, and follow up -- are discussed in detail. The concluding section includes, in question-answer format, a presentation of special dissemination problems. (Author/HLF)

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DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL OPERATION

A SIMULATION NOTEBOOK

PRESENTED AT

6TH NATIONAL SEMINAR ON YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

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by

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DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT YEAR ROUND SCHOOL OPERATION

INTRODUCTION

Year Round School is an innovation different than any other program you have attempted in your school district. It is different in that it produces change in the way of life of your students, parents of students involved, school staff involved, and possibly much of the community. Your dissemination program must be broader and more inclusive; it must be better planned and executed than any other innovative program, so far, in your district.

It is mandatory that with the dissemination plan a public support system be maintained through the initial dissemination phase as well as during the implimentation stage and during the first years of the operational stage. Without this broad public support pressures to the return of the status-quo will be too great for the system to maintain the Year Round School.

HOW TO DEVELOP A DISSEMINATION PROGRAM THAT REALLY WORKS

Selection of Personnel. The selection of dissemination personnel is of utmost importance. Ideally, the person in charge of the dissemination of information about Year Round School operation should be the same person that is usually in charge of the dissemination of your other school programs. If Year Round School is good for the present system, then the present system can handle the Year Round School Dissemination Program. Avoid duplicate systems. Make Year Round School Dissemination a part of the total Dissemination process.

It may be [illegible] you need supportive staff from time to time to help with the dissemination program. Choose well informed people or inform them yourself about the facts. These persons could very well come from the Year Round School Study Committee, interested board members, other administrative personnel, school staff leaders, and/or other persons who would give legitimacy to the dissemination of Year Round School.

Three Phases of Dissemination. There are three phases to the dissemination of the Year Round School: The lead up phase, the implementation phase, and the follow-up phase.

The lead up phase is the time before a firm decision is made by the power structure to implement a particular Year Round School Plan on a specified date.

The implementation phase is the time after the firm power decision to the date of implementation.

The follow-through phase is the day after the implementation of Year Round School to the point where Year Round School is an accepted life style within the community and is unquestioned. Each phase is critical.

The Lead Up Phase. The lead up phase is to inform the public. At this time the purpose of Year Round School needs to be outlined. Be honest. If your task is to keep the total school community abreast of educational ideas and processes, do just that. If your district has a problem that could be solved through the implementation of a type of Year Round School Plan, then inform the public of the problem and the possible solutions.

1. Determine how long the lead up phase will be
2. Make a time line
3. Plot dissemination goals
4. Brainstorm all the resources available to disseminate information
5. Figure the cost of the dissemination program, separating those that are free to the district from those that cost money

Your goals will be lists of groups to inform, dates by which they are to be informed, methods by which they will be informed. The "what" has already been determined by your purpose.

Be consistent with the facts that you are presenting. Nothing confuses the public more than the dissemination of inconsistent facts. It is the school district's responsibility to provide the facts concerning the designated per pupil

expenditures in the catagories of: transportation, administrative costs, heating and air-conditioning, maintenance, and teaching staff.

Other facts provided by the district will depend on the problem to be solved. For instance, if the problem is space, the district will provide the necessary demographic projections and the effects upon the existing schools as well as costs for building and maintaining schools on a per pupil basis as compared to the New Plan.

If the problems is more time for short vacations then these facts must be included. If it is curriculum to be upgraded, the new curriculum must be defined in terms of its costs of implementation as the system now exists as compared with the cost per pupil or Year Round School. If it is energy to be converted, the savings on electricity, natural gas or coal must be computed along with the other per pupil expenditures. The facts are to be gathered carefully as this is what will be disseminating.

Somewhere along the line responsible people are deciding which Year Round School Plan fits this particular community. Your dissemination program will reflect the thinking of this group of people. (If your dissemination program is merely to keep your public abreast of educational ideas then the application of a particular Year Round School Plan for your community is not necessary.

Disseminate the information regarding Year Round School Plans in terms that apply to your own community. It is very important that you disseminate information about the successes of other school districts operating the same type of Year Round School. However, nothing eats away at the dissemination of a Year Round School Program faster than the continued dissemination of a Year Round School Plan and calendar that fits another community.

Inform the entire community during the lead up phase as you would any other innovative program in your school district. Use your broadest forms of coverage. Do not concentrate efforts on a particular group at this point. Disseminate the facts widely through the news media as well as through the usual information channels already established in your own school system. Be a reporter. Do it on a regular basis. Be consistent with your facts. During this phase it will be helpful for you to make a list of community leaders, staff leaders, and others from whom opinions are sought by the people of your community. Write this information down for future reference.

The dissemination of Year Round School during the lead up phase will be low level. The community needs to know about a possible forthcoming decision that will affect their lives. Too little publicity before a decision will cause the public to feel that the school district is shoving them around. Too much publicity before the "Big Decision" will cause the public to react to a decision that has not been made yet.

Inform the community of the problem, the general facts concerning the problem, and the appointed committee which is studying the whole situation. Report to the public the findings of the committee and any visitations the committee makes.

Care must be taken in informing the press about the real situation. Be open with the press and radio. Most school news reporters have proven to be supportative of any worthwhile plan that is "good" for the community and its children. Invite reporters to observe the meaty sessions of the committee as well as inviting them to report on the progress of the board of education concerning Year Round School. If one or two plans are being considered, take a news reporter along with other committee members to visit a school or schools which have successfully implemented Year Round School. Your news reporter may turn out to be your very strongest ally.

You will be presenting Year Round School information to staff and community groups. Develop an interesting, brief talk centered around your dissemination purposes. Use visual aids. Make your ideas as simple to understand as possible. Avoid educational pedagogy. Present all sessions in a friendly, informational manner. Too much enthusiasm gives the impression that the decision has already been made. The lead up is to inform the public of a chance to be considered.

Answer all questions that you can. If a legitimate question arises that you cannot answer at the time, admit it.

If this requires more information on your part, or the part of the Year Round School Study Committee tell the person when he can call your office for the answer, then be sure to have the answer when he calls.

Develop information sheets. Your audience will appreciate being able to take home well designed materials to re-read at their leisure, as well as to use in explaining your talk to their friends and neighbors. Avoid too much information on any one sheet.

The Implementation Phase. The Board of Education has made the decision on a particular Year Round School Plan. The communication among the committee members, school board, administration and the press has been open. The ad-hoc Year Round School Committee has disbanded. Problem: How to Disseminate information as quickly as possible so that the public is well informed about the changes to be made to have a workable, pleasant situation.

Your lead up dissemination will support you. You have reported all facts to the press. A committee has studied the plan and made recommendations to the board. You have the board decision. This is the time for enthusiasm. Muster all you have.

The Dissemination purpose has changed. Not only must you continue to inform, but now you must persuade and convince the public that the decision to have a particular Year Round

School Plan by a particular date is the right one for the times in your community.

Draw another time line. Your goal is to disseminate information to each person involved in your Year Round School Plan of the changes involved in the system as well as the changes that will be taking place in their lives. Plot your time line carefully making sure that each community group is covered thoroughly before the "BIG DAY."

Design a group presentation that informs the public about the problem to be solved and why this particular solution is best. Describe the Year Round School scheduling system, the new calendar, and in general, the details of the plan. Be specific in talking about the details that concern a particular group. Visual aids are helpful. Be positive. Convince them of the advantages the New Plan has to offer them. Answer all questions. If asked for your opinion on difficulty of change, acknowledge that any change is difficult and that there will be problems at first. State the problems, how they will be solved and by whom. Anticipate all questions ahead of time. Brainstorm all the possible questions so that you have worked out an appropriate answer for each question.

Update the information sheets that are passed out at the meetings. The information on these sheets will answer the most asked questions. Again keep your answer sheets simple.

Contact each major community organization for a speaking engagement date. Plot this on your time line. Make all

the speaking commitments. You may want to form dissemination teams for this procedure. Again choose your personnel wisely. You will want to consider a team of people who are authorities and represent the power structure in your school system. There is nothing like getting information form the TOP MAN, himself.

If you have a large dissemination problem and only a short period of time to cover the area, you may want people to help you with your dissemination project. If this is the case, design a slide-tape presentation that covers all the major areas with simple explanations. This way you get consistancy in your distribution of facts. This is an important principle: consistancy of facts.

Inform the staff that will be involved. Give them the privilege of being the first to hear your news if the entire district is not involved. The superintendent and the building principal should present the plan. It may be well to have a board member included. These people will be well informed of the changes that are to take place. The dissemination takes on an air of opportunity for the selected staff. Present the plan in its generalities with enough details to be understood but not so detailed as to be boring. Compliment the staff for their work under the present situation. This is important. You will want the staff to feel like the plan will solve some of their present problems and work situations, not that they

have been doing a bad job with what they have to work with. Be direct. Outline some of the problems that the teachers and the principal will have to work out together.

Outline a plan, prior to the board decision, for contacting your community leaders. This way they can be contacted immediately after the board's decision. One way is to invite all prominent community leaders to a special meeting. Busy people have many meetings. Make this one a dinner meeting or of special nature so they will want to come. The contacting of your community leaders is important at the beginning of the implementation stage. These are the people that your community members will be seeking advice and information from. Make them feel important at your meeting. Spare no expense within the district means at making them comfortable. They make up your powerful support group. Present the general plans briefly so that the meeting moves along quickly. Compliment them on their leadership within the community. This is important. You will ask them again for their leadership. This time for their continued support of the schools and this new program. Give this meeting an air of celebration and of festive importance to all.

Another way is to send each prominent community leader an "Important Announcement Packet." Prepare well several papers on: The basic outline of the Year Round School Plan; Which schools will be affected; Costs of the new plan in

per pupil expenditures as compared to the present costs; The unique features of your plan; The problems it will solve; How it will affect the community. Design the packet with a positive approach. Make it desirable to read, not just something to throw in the wastebasket. Printed booklets are not desirable at this point. They take too long to print. The information must be in their hands as quickly as possible. Be sure to list your phone number and when you can be reached for further information and speaking engagements. Contact your community leaders by phone. Ask them if they received your packet of information. Be personal. Compliment them on a personal leadership quality or known community effort and/or accomplishment. Encourage them to call on you for further information.

It may be at this point that the Year Round School Plan is causing this particular organization problems concerning reorganization, too. If this is the case you will want to take steps to create a bond between the school district and the organization involved. More problems are solved through cooperation and working together than by forcing the organizations to reorganize. If this is the case, avoid any authoritarian comments. What you are trying to prevent is a community back lash. Your plan is in its early stages. Cooperation is what makes it grow strong. Make many concerted efforts for personal contact, as soon as possible.

"Coffee Klatches" is a way to meet informally with small groups of people. Contact your PTA workers. Ask them if they would like to invite 10 - 12 neighbors into their home to have your explanation of the Year Round School Plan. Bring the coffee cake and have her supply the coffee. Be prompt. Make a short, concise presentation with visual aids. Be informal and friendly. Accept their criticisms. With understanding most criticisms can be turned toward a positive idea. If they can't, be honest and accept the situation. No institution has a perfect record. Your task is to inform with facts, dispel fears, and reassure the public that the school district has the best interests of their children in mind. Once your "Coffee Klatch" idea gets around - other people will contact you for small informal meetings of this nature.

Keep the Year Round School Plan alive and before your public. Contact the press and radio frequently on the progress of your implementation plans. Give the press and radio positive information for their copy. Be enthusiastic. Arrange for a radio interview through your local station. Many school districts have a weekly local program about their school district to inform the public of the work being done as part of their on-going public relations program. Many times the radio station will arrange for an explanation of the

Year Round School with an audience telephone participation question and answer session. Give yourself broader coverage by notifying the press of your forth-coming radio interview so that they can announce it to their readers.

Follow up dissemination with the staff members involved is a must. As you dispel fears with knowledge in the community, so you must with the staff. Report regularly through the school staff communication system exactly what is taking place. Be available for each of their meetings on Year Round School. If this is not possible, designate someone as your trusted representative, to be present.

The teachers need their own dissemination program. It could be a question and answer booklet containing all the questions teachers have had so far with the appropriate answers. This would be a booklet in which present questions could be added along with their respective answers.

Explain the Year Round School Plan to the students. This could be done in a school assembly with a short speech and visual aids. MAKE SURE YOU POINT OUT THE ADVANTAGES FOR THEM. The teachers can help by answering individual questions in the classroom. If this applies to the high school then written information must be sent out periodically through the student newspaper or other organized student information system. Keep in touch with your student newspaper reporters. Give them good copy. A total student body assembly may not be the answer or be necessary for high school students.

Their greatest fears will be concerning their present job opportunities, courses available, grades, and proper college entrance times. It is your job to reassure the students that their welfare is of greatest importance to the school district by telling them the alternatives that have been worked out for them.

Follow Up Phase. Report the smooth operation of the first week of Year Round School to your community leaders. Make this a personal letter. If appropriate, thank them for their cooperation.

Report the same information to your news media contacts. Thank the public for their cooperation.

Give information to the staff personally by being available at staff meetings, in the halls, and in faculty and staff lunch areas. Disseminate written information and compliments through regular communication channels.

Continue to report to the public all information concerning the continued developments of Year Round School.

SPECIAL DISSEMINATION PROBLEMS

QUESTION: What do you do when you encounter community hostility?

ANSWER: Most importantly, institutional change means people change. Dissemination of Year Round School means not only dissemination of information but the provisions for feedback, positive and negative. It is a well known fact that people tend to resist change. With resistance comes hostility, and in some cases, open warfare. Your dissemination team needs to be prepared to cope with groups of people who are positive toward it as well as with groups who are hostile toward the plan. The coping may be as simple as having your team members realize this fact and to be prepared mentally to accept the negative feedback as a usual people response. It is important however, that the people with negative feelings as well as those with positive feelings be heard and understood. People's demands must all be heard and answered if you are to have a successful dissemination program.

Realizing when and from what factions of your community you are receiving positive and negative feedback will help you plan a direction for your dissemination program. Perhaps a faction of your community has been misinformed by a person with little knowledge. Perhaps a large segment of your community feels like this is a plan to have empty classrooms so that this section will be reorganized to bus in blacks. Perhaps hostility simply comes from being fed up with the power structure pushing people around. Whatever the reason, it cannot be ignored.

There seems to be a direct relationship between the date of implementation of Year Round School and the rise of emotional responses, both positive and negative, to Year Round School. It seems to be directly proportional. In other words, if Year Round School is just another plan that may be implemented in the non-existent future there seems to be little or no negative or positive response. On the other hand, if Year Round School is the plan to solve an acute problem in the very near future, high emotional responses are going to arise quickly, perhaps overnight. This may mean a highly positive, high emotional response, and/or a negative, high emotional response. These situations must be anticipated.

QUESTION: I am a member of my community study committee. How do I begin to interest other people in Year Round School?

ANSWER: This means you will handle basic instructional programs for a group or groups of people who want to keep abreast of educational happenings. Dissemination of Year Round School will probably follow these steps.

(1) Gathering the facts concerning each type of Year Round School in operation through visitation and written information about:

a. Four Quarter Plan

b. Trimester Plan

c. Quinmester Plan

d. 45 - 15 Plan

e. Rotating Four Quarter Plan

f. 60 - 2- Plan

g. Any and all variations of the above

(2) Presenting the material:

a. Hiring a well-informed consultant

b. Lecture by a well informed member of the organization

c. Panel discussion

d. Open forums

e. Charts

f. Graphs

g. Films

h. Magazine articles

i. Books

j. Documented studies from Year Round Schools, successful or unsuccessful

(3) Broadening the instructional base:

a. Local radio reports & interviews

b. Local news releases

c. Open organization meetings

QUESTION: I am not on any study committee. I feel strongly in favor of Year Round School, what can I do?

ANSWER: As a citizen at large there are many things you can so if you feel Year Round School is a solution to a particular problem in your area. A well organized, well planned informative speech with some type of visual aids is very effective. It takes you time and energy to put it across to the public. This requires decision and commitment on your part. In order to reach the people in the structure that have the power to produce change takes many presentations, much time, and much involvement on your part. Positive change does not take place until many people are informed with facts. If you are this type of person, you may want to disseminate information. Try speaking to:

1. Chamber of Commerce

2. Service groups

3. P.T.A.'s

4. Board meetings

5. Any place where you can be heard by a group of any size.

You may want to broaden your base of dissemination. In this case, contact organizations in surrounding communities for speaking engagements and presentations. The more practice you get the more information you can gather. The more you are known throughout your area the more people will listen to your ideas.

There have been many such citizens throughout the United States that have advocated Year Round School and talked about it before it was a popular subject. These people paved the way for the power structure to act.

It does take a time and energy commitment as well as a factual, well organized, interesting presentation.

QUESTION: I think some type of Year Round School may help to solve our space problem. But, our community is traditional. I don't thing they will accept it.

ANSWER: Perhaps they won't go for it. It may very well be that they would be willing to put out more money for classrooms rather than change to Year Round School. A good dissemination program does not always mean successful sales of a new plan. In some cases communities resist change as a tradition. Under these conditions, tradition may be stronger than any good dissemination program that is put together, no matter what.

QUESTION: The majority of the board members are in favor of Year Round School. Two board members are against it. The decision is made. We are committed in one year to change. I am in charge of dissemination. What can I do?

ANSWER: This is a difficult situation when the power structure is split over issues. Before designing a dissemination program, accept the fact that some of the members of the power structure are going to be against the idea and not necessarily, at this time, against you. Listen carefully to what the opposition is saying. Research the facts. Many times people change their minds when the facts are all in. Board members are usually elected. They may be supporting a community view. If so, concentrate dissemination in that area through small group talks of a personal nature. If the board member feels that segment of the community is no longer as hostile the board member may then be more relaxed about the situation. Opposition can be a good thing. It serves as a check and balance system. It just may be that the opposition has a very good point. Year Round School cannot solve all problems. In that case, give in. There may be a way that each side can get together on a compromise so that no one looses face.

TIP: Don't get so identified with Year Round School that in order to get rid of Year Round School they get rid of you.

QUESTION: I am in charge of dissemination of information about Year Round School. We have no extraordinary problems and are not interested, presently, in changing to Year Round School.

ANSWER: Your job then is like that of a reporter, informing the public. Do just that. Gather the facts concerning school districts and Year Round School and inform the public.

QUESTION: We are very much interested in the 45 - 15 Plan. Legislation has not been passed to insure the legality of the plan for our district. What direction should our dissemination program take?

ANSWER: It is apparent that you will not go very far with your plan unless legislation has been passed. If your state legislators oppose the 45 - 15 Plan you are in difficulty! You will have to combine efforts with a more powerful organization in order to lobby with your congressman. More and more State Chambers of Commerce as well as powerful business people are sharing resources with schools. How bad do you want the plan? It will take money and effort to disseminate written information and personally contacting these people. If it is a matter that the state hasn't gotten around to yet, then this is different. It does, however, take a budget for trave, expenses, and dissemination materials. Work through your intermediate school organization (County Office.) They will open the doors at the state for you. After contacting the right state people on the legislation that you need, they wil help you get the appropriate legislation approved. In the meantime, gain support from your own local representatives. Keep them informed of your idea and plans. Most states have been passing permissive legislation allowing school districts to implement the 45 - 15 Plan with little difficulty.

QUESTION: We are a small school district. Our budget is very tight. We cannot afford a dissemination budget. What are the most important things to include in dissemination plans of Year Round School? We are going on the plan a year after this.

ANSWER: Some staff members will have to take double duty. Administrators are not under union contract, but they may resign if their work load is unnecessarily increased. It requires much work, usually in the evenings. Many administrators will take extra responsibilities for various reasons. Anyway, need someone who will spearhead a dissemination program. Facts must be gathered by someone so that the community can be objectively informed. Community people want to hear what will happen to them and their children. Most do not really care about what happened in School District X. Design your dissemination program to be personal. Make many small group talks to local business men, community leaders, parents, and community at large.

QUESTION: High School Students are putting a lot of pressure on us. They say it is their lives and schooling we are rearranging. What dissemination procedure should we take there?

ANSWER: It is true that high school students can apply a lot of pressure on parents. If they become vocal, their parents are more likely to listen to them rather than you. The easiest way of handling this situation is to include student representatives at the planning and implementating stage. These students need to be helped with their own dissemination of information. There needs to be a two-way feedback system set up through the high school. This can be done mainly through the existing schools communication media. The distribution of a student question and answer booklet or Hot Line Sheet from the student office and small group discussions lead by informed students would be of help. The students need to know their concerns are not taken lightly, especially their job and college entrance concerns.

QUESTION: We are studying Year Round School. No decision has been made. We are not even sure we want it. We have been disseminating some information through our local newspapers and through community groups as our research committee is made up of representative community people. The Dissemination has been low level and informative. Our committee is concerned because they have been running into some hostility. What is the matter with our Dissemination program?

ANSWER: Probably nothing much. Evidently some of your committee members are enthusiastic about their study. An enthusiastic person can put across the idea, unintentionally, that the plan is going to be an actuality. Most likely the community is over reacting to the situation. Caution your committee in their talks to state their own feelings, which might be very supportative of the plan, and say, "These are my feelings and not necessarily those of the total committee, board members, etc." Community people can get the feeling, very early, that the board and administration are "going to put one over on them."

QUESTION: We are in the midst of deciding our Year Round School Plan. The teachers organization is opposing it. The board and the administration favor it. What dissemination procedures do we use?

ANSWER: If it is a real political situation where each structure is seeking to gain more political power, dissemination will not make much of a dent in the situation. Just make sure that the news media is informing the public of the facts.